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ABSTRACT

The current debate between liberals and communitarians in the field of political theory helps to explain the magnitude of the forces aligned against significant change regarding the communal dimensions of schooling and to expose current schooling practices that are most destructive of the possibility of vibrant community life. This essay notes the individual orientation in traditional liberal theory and contrasts it with the communal orientation in communitarian thinking; the distinction between the liberal emphasis on the right and the communitarian emphasis on the good; the liberal propensity for difference-blindness in policy formation against communitarian attention to particularity; and the liberal fondness for proceduralism against the communitarian allegiance to participation. Features of contemporary public schooling, such as the emphasis on individual testing and assessment, coincide with traditional liberal theory and that if public schooling were construed along lines consistent with communitarian theory the practice of assessment would be vastly different. The paper concludes that if schools move toward more emphasis on the communitarian ideal of the good with due concern for fundamental individual rights, the result will be a greater degree of democracy than traditional liberalism has allowed. Contains 13 references. (MAH)

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